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Lake Mead National Recreation Area
Nevada

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

General Management Plan Amendment Newsletter

Issue 1 Summer 2003

Dear Friends,

As most of you are probably aware, the water level in Lake Mead is lower than it has been over the past several years. Low water means extra beach and parking are available and provides visitors a chance to explore new beaches and coves. However, low water conditions have also resulted in substantial impacts to park and commercially operated facilities on Lake Mead. The Las Vegas Bay Marina and Lake Mead Cruises have had to be temporarily relocated. Other marinas have had to be reconfigured and moved out farther from the advancing shoreline. The launch ramps at Government Wash and Pearce Ferry have been closed and the operation of other ramps may also be in jeopardy if water levels continue to fall.

Park managers have determined that an amendment to the 1986 *General Management Plan* for Lake Mead National Recreation Area is required to address the existing and potential future low water conditions at Lake Mead and how they affect park operations and marina management. The National Park Service is beginning the planning process that will determine future locations for public and commercial lake access facilities on Lake Mead. This newsletter provides information about the planning process and how you can get involved.

We value your input regarding Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Thank you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

William K. Dickinson
Superintendent, Lake Mead National Recreation Area

Why Is the Water in Lake Mead Going down?

Lake Mead is a fluctuating reservoir, impounded by Hoover Dam and filled by the Colorado River. Lake Mead stores Colorado River water for delivery to farms, homes, and businesses in southern Nevada, Arizona, southern California, and northern Mexico. About 96 percent of the water in Lake Mead is from snow runoff from Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Each year, Lake Mead receives a minimum amount of Colorado River water from these states, known as the "Upper Basin" states, and a specific amount of water is released from Lake Mead to users in Nevada, Arizona, California, and Mexico. Water is released from Lake Mead only to meet downstream municipal and agricultural demands. Consequently, power demands in California, Arizona, and Nevada do not impact the lake's water level or "elevation."

In an "average" year the amount of water flowing out of Lake Mead exceeds the amount of water flowing into Lake Mead. In some years, Lake Mead receives much more than the minimum amount of water from the Upper Basin. But the amount of water released from Lake Mead does not vary much from year to year.

Lake Mead is typically at its highest yearly elevation in the late fall and early spring months. The lake begins to drop in elevation in the late spring and early summer when the desert heats up and causes a higher demand for agricultural and municipal water in the Las Vegas Valley, in Arizona and California, and in Mexico.

If there are several consecutive years where outflow exceeds inflow, Lake Mead begins each year with lower water levels, and the elevation continues to drop until a "wet year" occurs in the Colorado River drainage. Then Lake Mead typically receives more water than it releases, and the lake again returns to higher elevations. This pattern—where the lake periodically fills to capacity then experiences a period of declining levels, only to fill up again— is projected to continue into the future. But no one can predict the weather, so it is not possible to predict when the high and low periods will occur.

Currently, the water level is going down because the runoff from the Colorado River drainage for the past four years has been far below normal. In 2000, for example, the runoff was 56 % of normal. In the subsequent three year period, the runoff was approximately 60 % of normal.

Because of this decreased runoff, Lake Mead has received only slightly more than the minimum required amount of water from the Upper Basin. But the amount of water going out from Lake Mead has remained at normal levels. So, there has been more water going out of Lake Mead in the past four years than there has been coming into the lake. This has caused the elevation to drop a little more each year.

Lower water levels only affect Lake Mead and have no bearing on the water levels of Lake Mohave, also part of Lake Mead NRA.

Hoover Dam

Callville Bay

Contact Us

For more information please contact Jim Holland at (702) 293-8986 or e-mail him at ***lame_gmpa_lowwater@nps.gov***

You can also log on to Lake Mead National Recreation Area's home page at ***http://www.nps.gov/lame*** or the National Park Service planning Web page at ***http://www.nps.gov/planning.***

For current information on launch ramp conditions you can log on to ***http://www.nps.gov/lame/launch.html*** or call (702) 293-8907.

The Planning Process? How Can You Get Involved?

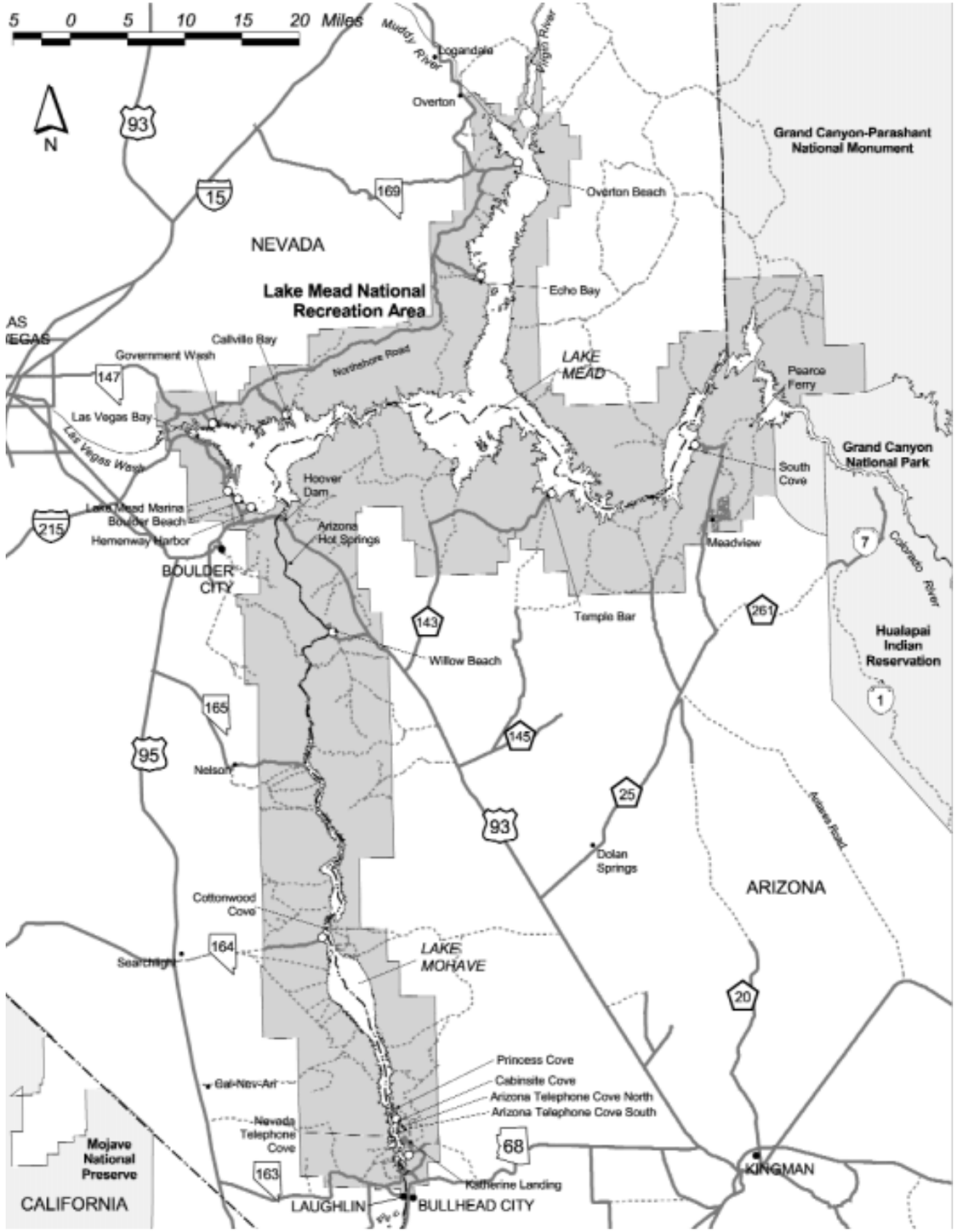
The schedule below summarizes the major steps in the planning process and the opportunities for you to get involved. The entire process should be completed within approximately two years. Should the National Park Service determine that an environmental impact statement is required, additional steps to complete the process would be necessary following the notice of intent.

We are currently in step 1. To make the process work, and to ensure that public views and concerns are addressed, we need your feedback. You can participate in the first step of the planning process by completing the enclosed comment form.

Please be aware that the names and addresses of respondents may be released under the Freedom of Information Act. Our practice is to make comments, including names and addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. We may not consider anonymous comments. However, individual respondents may request that this information not be released, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection.

General Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment Process

Step	Planning Activity	Public Involvement Opportunities
1	Gather information and identify planning issues and concerns.	Read this newsletter and comment on the response form.
2	Identify a range of reasonable alternatives, assess their effects, and select a preferred alternative.	Read alternatives newsletter #2 and send in comments.
3	Prepare and publish GMP amendment /Environmental Assessment.	Attend public meetings and provide comments. Provide written comments on the GMP amendment /Environmental Assessment.
4	Prepare and issue Finding of No Significant Impact or Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.	



Why Is a General Management Plan Amendment Needed?

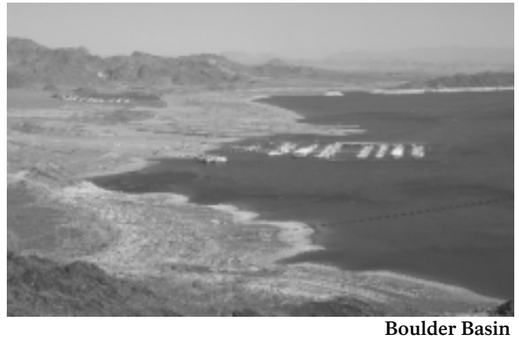
The 1986 *General Management Plan* for Lake Mead National Recreation Area provides the overall management direction for the recreation area. It established management zones to accommodate increasing visitor use while protecting park resources.

Lake Mead National Recreation Area needs a general management plan amendment (GMP amendment) because lake level conditions on Lake Mead have changed substantially since the current general management plan was approved in 1986. For the last 30 years lake elevations on Lake Mead were held within 40 feet of full pool. Full pool is the lake's upper elevation limit and is determined by the spillway elevation at Hoover dam. Recreational facilities were able to expand and operate within the 40-foot fluctuation zone.

The past three to four years of drought conditions experienced in the Colorado River drainage, coupled with a greater use of the storage capacity of Lake Mead to support rapid growth in the southwestern United States, has resulted in the dramatic decline in Lake Mead waters. Lake elevations are currently 75 feet below full pool and could continue to drop.

The normal ability of launch ramps and marinas to operate within the water fluctuation zone is limited by the existing and projected low water conditions, underwater and shoreline topography, and the availability of necessary infrastructure such as utilities and parking.

The GMP amendment will evaluate the physical setting and make decisions relative to the future locations of public and commercial lake access facilities on Lake Mead given the greater low water level fluctuations than previously planned for.



Boulder Basin

Another major change in conditions that has occurred since the completion of the 1986 plan has been the rapid formation of an expansive delta generated from erosion in Las Vegas Wash. Increasing flows in the wash have contributed to higher sediment flows being discharged into Las Vegas Bay. The dropping lake surface elevations have exposed approximately one mile of delta sediments and, along with daily wash flows, are contributing to the rapid spread of the delta.

Boat Launch at Overton Beach

Operation of theLasVegas Bay Marina became increasingly difficult and necessitated the emergency relocation of the marina to Horsepower Cove in October, 2002. The marina will remain at Horsepower Cove until completion of the GMP amendment, which will address all low water concerns related to commercial operations on Lake Mead.

How Does the General Management Plan Amendment Relate to the Lake Management Plan?

A Lake Management Plan for the management of water-based recreation within Lake Mead National Recreation Area was recently completed and approved in April 2003. The plan identified facility improvements, capacities, locations, and expansions for the developments that control access on Lake Mead. Facility development is based on the lake's carrying capacity.

All alternatives to be considered in the general management amendment planning effort will be consistent with and contribute to fulfilling the management intent and direction established in the Lake Management Plan to the extent practicable. The Lake Management Plan provides for an increase in boating capacity targeted at areas where growth can be accommodated within the physical, environmental, and social carrying capacity. The identified recreational opportunities and types and capacities of commercial marina services and public launch ramps will be used to guide the development of the alternatives for the GMP amendment/environmental assessment.

Echo Bay